



## Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

Online Version: <https://www.feedthefuture.gov/article/small-fish-yield-big-results-women-break-gender-barriers-rwanda>

## Small Fish Yield Big Results as Women Break Gender Barriers in Rwanda



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Members of COOPPAVI are breaking gender stereotypes by catching fish to feed their community in Rwanda.

On the shores of Lake Kivu, where fishing is a male-dominated industry, members of Coopérative pour la Promotion de Pêche et des Activités de Vente d'Isambaza (COOPPAVI) are breaking down barriers for women by catching fish to feed their community. COOPPAVI began as an all-women's cooperative and has expanded to also include male members.

The cooperative, which has a history of teaching about the nutritional value of fish and how to cook it, decided to initiate a small operation to catch and sell a nutritious fish called isambaza. At the start, the women's group had only rudimentary production. But in 2010, with an \$85,000 Feed the Future grant from the U.S. African Development Foundation (USADF), a Feed the Future partner agency, cooperative members leveraged the financial and technical support to build their business operations, increase production and sales, and work toward a brighter future free from hunger. More specifically, they invested in basic fishing and processing equipment, as well as a variety of training programs on governance, financial management, fishing techniques, fishery regulations and fish handling hygiene. With the help of local expertise, they also developed an administrative procedures manual and a business plan.

In 2013, COOPPAVI received a second USADF grant of \$143,000 over four years, which it used to expand from selling fresh isambaza to drying and processing it into fishmeal. COOPPAVI is the only local producer of this highly nutritious fishmeal, which has already become a go-to product for many, including pregnant and lactating mothers in surrounding communities.

By investing in infrastructure, a processing factory and packaging materials, COOPPAVI is quickly becoming a household name in the Rubavu District and the Lake Kivu region of Rwanda. The women of COOPPAVI have worked to further improve the name recognition of their product by demonstrating its use to school administrators and other potential buyers. They have also worked closely with the Rwandan environmental and health authorities to meet standards to sell their flour in supermarkets.

In addition, the COOPPAVI women monitor the cooperative's fishing activity on a rotational basis and offload the catch from a larger boat, ferrying it to the factory for processing before selling the fishmeal not only in Rwanda but also across the lake in the Congolese towns of Goma and Bukavu. As a result of their efforts, all 48 COOPPAVI members have paid medical insurance, and 43 out of 48 are able to afford electricity and piped water in their homes.

The Rubavu District authorities have named COOPPAVI, with its nine full-time workers and 25 part-timing fishing teams, the most competent cooperative in the district, and have enlisted it to help in a nutritional campaign in the region. For young women in the community, COOPPAVI serves as an example of how women can break gender stereotypes and manage a viable, non-traditional business.

*For over 35 years, USADF has helped Africa's most vulnerable communities build pathways to prosperity through community-led development. As one of 11 U.S. Government agencies participating in Feed the Future, USADF is committed to investing in Rwanda's food security, and helping all Africans contribute to Africa's growth story.*